

“*Hana*” as manifestation of beauty in Japanese noh: Contrasting the flower with Korean’s *shinmyong* (spontaneous *katharsis*)

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世阿弥の花：理論と実践 韓国の神明と比べて

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A concept mentioned by many researchers and performers, implicitly or explicitly, during PACKAJ 1 was *hana* (花, Flower). Today I propose to explore the concept of *hana* as originally employed by actor-playwright-theorist Zeami Motokiyo in regard to the noh masked-drama. Then I will attempt to compare this concept to *shinmyong*, a central concept of Korean dance that has been called “truly the flower of traditional Korean drama esthetics” (Meewon Lee 1997: 38).

Zeami notes the healing function of noh: “It can be said that the purpose of the art of the no is to serve as a means to pacify people’s heart and to move the high and the low alike, which brings prosperity to all of us and promotes a long life” (*Fûshikaden*, Style and the Flower: 40). Yet this appears to be successful promotion rather than any deep belief in its shamanic curative powers, rarely mentioned elsewhere. For Zeami, noh was first and foremost not a ritual for prosperity or health, but an art form.

For Zeami, *hana* was the ultimate expression of an actor’s beauty. It has been variously translated in English as “charisma,” “charm,” “beauty,” and “fascination.”¹⁾ In later writings, it was seen as relating to “novelty, fascination” (*omoshiroki*, 面白き) and “grace, mysterious beauty” (*yûgen*, 幽玄). For Zeami, *hana* was more than a metaphor, but a clear and visible manifestation of an actor’s performance mastery. Here follows some of his salient ideas found in his writings, secret treatises intended to insure his descendants continued their assiduous seeking for mastery in the competitive world of noh performance.

Zeami’s eternally-blooming Flower

Zeami’s writings spanned many decades, and frequently offer contradictory statements

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reflecting a growing understanding.²⁾ *Hana* is innate: a young child will emanate it even without training; yet this early manifestation is a transient flower; one must not be fooled by flattery but practice strenuously to maintain the flower as an adult. Even if an actor has temporarily lost one's Flower, its cultivation will enable one to possess the seeds (skills) that will, with hard work, manifest itself again later as Flower:

The color of each flower that blooms is different; yet to those who look at them, each partakes of beauty. Even though an actor has learned only a few parts, if he has really been able to manifest his Flower in them, he will never lose his reputation when he performs them. (*Fûshikaden*, Style and the Flower: 23)

Happily, the Flower is available to actors of any age. But there will be times in his long career that an actor will lose his way, and must recover the Flower.

There is no flower that remains and whose petals do not scatter. And just because the petals scatter, then, when the flower blooms again, it will seem fresh and novel. (*Fûshikaden*, Style and the flower: 52)

Although unable to move vigorously, an old man can express this even while seeming to "do nothing", achieving the special fascination of "a flower blooming on an old branch!"

Yet even when once possessed, one cannot rest on one's laurels.

A truly great artist who enjoys the genuine approbation of his audience will be able to perform in all styles and make each of them enjoyable. Styles of acting and the basic forms of the art may differ variously, but what is effective about each is common to all. This moving quality is the Flower." (*Fûshikaden*, Style and the Flower: 39)

It is not just the court nobles, beautiful courtesans, or dashing warriors that possess the Flower. In demon roles, the flower is maintained by seeking the gentle human heart of the monster, balancing imitation (*monomane*) with grace (*yugen*), employing stillness-amidst-movement by keeping the torso firm when the feet stamp; or the feet firm while the torso twists in arm movements. This follows from the more general principle that emotion must be contained in order to be effective:

When you feel ten in your heart, express seven in your movements....the motion is more restrained than the emotion behind it. (*Kakyô*, A Mirror Held to the Flower: 75)

Thus one way to keep the Flower fresh is by returning continually to the "Beginner's Mind," constantly finding novelty, even mixing previously discarded impurities with smooth grace to achieve unexpected Fascination.

Zeami is precise yet ambiguous on the role of conscious effort for true mastery. On the one hand, the actor must relinquish self-will to allow the spirit to move him,

[For portraying women one employs] Movement beyond Consciousness 舞知: the creation of an atmosphere...in which the appearance of the actor can go beyond mere techniques and concrete forms. Such a performance resembles a bird that opens its wings and trusts itself to the movement of the winds. (*Kakyô*, A Mirror Held to the Flower: 80)

Yet even from the clouds of soaring spirit, the masterful actor must observe the ground with pene-

tration eyes. While those with only a surface Flower may achieve temporary popularity, only those with True flower can conquer all audiences, including true connoisseurs able to recognize the inner fascination:

(M)atching the feeling to the moment...the experienced actor can absorb the concentration of the audience into his own performance. This moment is, in fact, the most crucial one in the entire day's presentation. (*Kakyô*, A Mirror Held to the Flower, p. 82)

This intuitive analysis of the spectators is manifest in one's very first appearance:

First the actor leaves the green room, stops as he approaches the stage from the bridge, takes cognizance of the audience, and then, just when the spectators think that he is to begin his opening speech, he must commence at exactly that instant when his feelings match those of his audience...(Kakyô, A Mirror Held to the Flower: 81)

Yet even as he must discover empathic feelings in the spectators, the actor is a technician, who must be fully knowledgeable of the precise means of moving spectators:

(I)t is said that 'the eyes look ahead and the spirit looks behind.' This expression means that the actor looks in front of him with his physical eyes, but inner concentration must be directed to the appearance of his movements from behind (*Kakyô*, A Mirror Held to the Flower: 81).

The objectivity of the subjective perspective requires almost supernatural awareness:

An actor must come to have an ability to see himself as the spectators do, grasp the logic of the fact that the eyes cannot see themselves, and find the skill to grasp the whole—left and right, ahead and behind. If an actor can achieve this, his peerless appearance will be as elegant as that of a flower or a jewel and will serve as a living proof of his understanding. (*Kakyô*, A Mirror Held to the Flower: 81).

The Flower of Zeami, then, is an individual possession, essential yet difficult to obtain or maintain throughout one's lifetime. Above all, as Shelley Quinn's recent book tracing the trajectory of his writings has shown, Zeami's method is one of actorly attunement:

- to the chant and music
- to the character through song and dance balanced with imitation (*monomane*, 物真似)
- to the rhythmic trajectory of *opening*, *development*, *climax* (*jo-ha-kyu*, 序破急)
- to the atmosphere of the venue (rustic/court; party/contest) and spectators' mood
- to the proper occasion (formal, informal) and level of dignity (*kurai*, 位)

In sum Zeami's prescription for becoming a good performer, recognized among commoners and the elite, in whatever performance circumstance, is recognizing one's innate Flower and nurturing it throughout one's lifetime. This Flower, once obtained properly, will grow in many soils, with a variety of blooms, throughout the seasons. Now let's examine whether *hana* is a unique to Japan and noh, or a hothouse native variety of a naturally occurring concept?

Hana and Shinmyong

If *Hana* is the touchstone for masterful beauty in *noh*, how does it relate to *shinmyong*, a concept described as, “the fountainhead of the Korean people’s aesthetic consciousness” (Chai 1987: 155). *Shinmyong* has been defined as an ecstatic energy:

- Sparked by a god-wind, a power received from above and beyond, as energies are received, rather than expressly created.
- Resulting in a performer’s abundance of *ki* energy, provoking rising, pulsating movements: “A “godspell” as the *munyo*, possessed by the god, moves her shoulders up and down in the slow, graceful, undulating motions while her whole body trembles” (Song 1990: 33).
- Infectiously instilling spontaneous singing and dancing among spectators
- Finally, all are swept away with the feeling of unity with each other, the cosmos, and nature

Shinmyong can be seen as a social manifestation of an individual shaman’s journey, an overcoming of obstacles through a powerful surge of inspired energy that breaks restraint and restrictions to create a temporary “*communitas*” of structure-less humanity, an “ecstatic eruption of solo and group emotion” (Song 1990: 33). This collective expression of overcoming pain and resentment through renewed faith in the group. It is both a leveling and a raising of humans to godlike potency and spontaneous feeling, a virtuous circle of participation where all contribute to the performance and all are rewarded with ecstasy:

The humor, sarcasm, and ridicule of the ruling classes, expressed through both the movements and dialogue of the dancers, highly pleased and was widely cheered by the audience....*shinmyong* served to unite the dancer with the audience, making them one....[Folk ritual *shinmyong*] arises not from a special type of polish or refinement of any sort, but from the culture that sprouts naturally from the everyday life of the common people without being realized consciously (Song, 1990: 34).

A successful (efficacious, beautiful) performance is defined by the presence of *shinmyong*, the responsibility of performers and spectators alike.

While normally, shamanic healers endure a solitary journey, and practice one-on-one healing ceremonies, protecting through mystique their special potency as conduits for the spirits. But *shinmyong*, according to Chai, depends on a collective healing that can only be accomplished through identification of shaman and ritual participants as a *communitas* of fellow sufferers:

This encounter with gods implies a feeling of oneness with the gods, a sense of awe, a sense of ascension, a heady sense of intoxication, of burning, entrancement, or possession by an external force....When the body is possessed by the god, the possessed person rides the god’s wind, so to speak....The possessed shaman serves as a conduit for *shinmyong*, bringing out and igniting the *shinmyong* that hides deep in other people’s hearts (Chai 1997: 150).

Whether performing or observing, *shinmyong* is the touchstone for efficacious performance, a

"group ecstasy and mutual interdependence...*Shinmyong* vitalizes by untangling the knots of regret and longing, Koreans' ubiquitous *han*" (Chai 1987: 152).

Since folk performances often take part in Korea in open fields, public squares, farmer's homes, there is not the distinction between "stage" and "audience" that one finds in Japanese traditional theatre's specialist stages. Accordingly, there is less respect for "specialist" performers with unique abilities to channel beauty and spirit, as in noh:

[Masked dance-dramas are performed] in actual living areas and the collective *shinmyong* arising from that place suggest that all people gathered at the performance art partakers and participants in this drama of life. Here individual questions and individual *shinmyong* are collectivized and elevated into group events... (Anonymous 1988)

***Shinmyong* ecstasy and *hana* blossoming compared**

Like *hana*, *shinmyong* then is the essential aesthetic element in performances. A performer must possess it, but also invoke it in that day's spectators. In contrast, *hana* is a personal property, achieved through retrospection, secrets, restraint, and constant attunement to music, chant, and spectators. Nearly blind behind a small mask, draped in heavy robes, repeating by rote the familiar floor-patterns and simple gestures that make up the dance the noh actor may "forget himself" in his role. And there is little of the immediate feedback of enthusiastic shouts or "spontaneous combustion" evidenced in the *shinmyong* audience-participation. Instead, the actor, largely cut off (on a raised stage, behind the mask, in front of all the other performers) undergoes a quiet explosion of the interior.



Salz attempts to learn *Choyongmu*

The noh actor's *ki* energy is like a car's internal-combustion engine, powering a vehicle whose driver's skills are in steering and breaking. This encourages spectators to create an individual, personal connection to the performer and understanding of the character portrayed. There is no solidarity felt amongst spectators at the event, nor manifestation of the gods: it is a secular event of the highest aesthetic limit. Yet their support, and a master actor's familiarity with the journey, permits him to soar like "a bird that opens its wings and trusts itself to the movement of the winds" (Kakyô: 80). If noh lifts spectators to transcendent beauty, *shinmyong* employs god-given powers to heal and refresh the community: "If it is allowed its full expression then *shinmyong* resolves the resentment and pain accumulated in the course of life and gives fresh vigor to life" (Anonymous 1988).

In sum, the noh actor absorbs energy from the spectators, yet folds them into an internal energy that manifests itself in delicate mask-tilts, powerful angled and curved dances, sudden stamps. The Korean performer emanates a charismatically magnetic *shinmyong*, attracting audience *shinmyong* in a mutually enforcing energy-circle of increasing magnitude. So finally, Korean *shinmyong* bringing spectators together in a collective celebration of spontaneous joy, a field of rooted, sky-reaching flowers bursting in full bloom. While Japanese noh's *hana* superficially resembles *shinmyong*, the performer's intense introspection and attunement permitting spectators to glimpse the beautiful manifestation of a single Flower. They are vital principles but quite distinct aesthetic principals, expressive of respective national, historical, religious, and cultural circumstances.

Notes

- 1) The translations of Rimer and Yamazaki 1984 are the most fluent and widely-quoted ones today, and are used for all the quotes below. Yet rather than choose sides by translating nuanced words like *hana* and *yugen*, (Flower and Grace), instead leaving the English terms with capital letters, with full descriptions of their ambiguities in a Glossary. I find it instructive in English to read various translators: Nearman, Wilson, De Poorter.
- 2) Shelley Quinn's masterful analysis (2005) describes in minute detail the development of Zeami's thought.

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